

Congressman Ron Paul U.S. House of Representatives May 21, 2002

Don't Force Taxpayers to Fund Nation-Building in Afghanistan

Mr. PAUL. Madam Chairman, I thank the chairman for yielding me time. Madam Chairman, I rise in opposition to this bill. The President has not asked for this piece of legislation; he does not support it. We do not anticipate that it will be passed in the other body. But there is one good part of the bill, and that is the title, "Freedom Support." We all support freedom. It is just that this bill does not support freedom. Really, it undermines the liberties and the taxes of many Americans in order to pump another \$1.2 billion into Afghanistan.

One of the moral justifications, maybe, for rebuilding Afghanistan is that it was the American bombs that helped to destroy Afghanistan in our routing of the Taliban. But there is a lot of shortcomings in this method. Nation-building does not work. I think this will fail. I do not think it will help us.

I do not think for a minute that this is much different than social engineering that we try here in the U.S. with a lot of duress and a lot of problems; and now we are going to do it over there where we really do not understand the social conditions that exist, and it is not like here. Some, especially those in that part of the world, will see this as neo-colonialism because we are over there for a lot of different reasons. And even in the bill it states one of the reasons. It says, "We are to design an overall strategy to advance U.S. interests in Afghanistan." Well, I wonder what that means? Over 10 years ago there was an explicit desire and a statement made by the administration that until we had a unified government in Afghanistan, we could not build a gas pipeline across northern Afghanistan. And that is in our interests. Does that mean this is one of the motivations?

I imagine a lot of people here in the Congress might say no, but that might be the ultimate outcome. It is said that this bill may cut down on the drug trade. But the Taliban was stronger against drugs than the Northern Alliance. Drug production is up since we've been involved this past year in Afghanistan.

Madam Chairman, I think it is important to state first off that while it is true that the administration has not actively opposed this legislation, it certainly has not asked for nor does it support the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act. It did not support the bill when we marked it up in the International Relations Committee, it did not support the bill after it was amended in Committee, and it does not support the bill today.

Madam Chairman, perhaps the "Afghanistan Freedom Support Act" should more accurately be renamed the "Afghanistan Territorial Expansion Act," because this legislation essentially treats that troubled nation like a new American territory. In fact, I wonder whether we give Guam, Puerto Rico, or other American territories anywhere near \$1.2 billion every few years- so maybe we just should consider full statehood for Afghanistan. This new State of Afghanistan even comes complete with an American governor, which the bill charitably calls a "coordinator." After all, we can't just give away such a huge sum without installing an American overseer to ensure we approve of all aspects of the fledgling Afghan government. Madam Chairman, when we fill a nation's empty treasury, when we fund and train its military, when we arm it with our weapons, when we try to impose foreign standards and values within it, indeed when we attempt to impose a government and civil society of our own making upon it, we are nation-building. There is no other term for it. Whether Congress wants to recognize it or not, this is neo-colonialism. Afghanistan will be unable to sustain itself economically for a very long time to come, and during that time American taxpayers will pay the bills. This sad reality was inevitable from the moment we decided to invade it and replace its government, rather than use covert forces to eliminate the individuals truly responsible for September 11th. Perhaps the saddest truth is that Bin Laden remains alive and free even as we begin to sweep up the rubble from our bombs.

I am sure that supporters of this bill are well-intentioned, but judging from past experience this approach will fail to improve the lives of the average Afghan citizen. Though many will also attempt to claim that this bill is somehow about the attacks of 9/11, let's not fool ourselves: nation-building and social engineering are what this bill is about. Most of the problems it seeks to address predate the 9/11 attacks and those it purports to assist had nothing to do with those attacks.

If we are operating under the premise that global poverty itself poses a national security threat to the United States, then I am afraid we have an impossible task ahead of us.

As is often the case, much of the money authorized by this bill will go toward lucrative contracts with well-connected private firms and individuals. In short, when you look past all the talk about building civil society in Afghanistan and defending against terrorism, this bill is laden with the usual corporate welfare and hand-outs to special interests.

Among other harmful things, this legislation dramatically expands the drug war. Under the group we have installed in Afghanistan, opium production has skyrocketed. Now we are expected to go in and clean up the mess our allies have created. In addition, this bill will send some \$60 million to the United Nations, to help fund its own drug eradication program. I am sure most Americans agree that we already send the United Nations too much of our tax money, yet this bill commits us to sending even more.

The drug war has been a failure. Plan Colombia, an enormously expensive attempt to reduce drug production in that Andean nation, has actually resulted in a 25 percent increase in coca leaf and cocaine production. Does anyone still think our war on drugs there has been successful? Is it responsible to continue spending money on policies that do not work?

The bill also reflects a disturbing effort by the Washington elite to conduct experiments in social engineering in Afghanistan. It demands at least five times that the Afghans create a government that is "broad-based, multi-ethnic, gender-sensitive, and fully representative." We are imposing race and gender quotas on a foreign government that have been found inappropriate and in some cases even illegal in the United States. Is this an appropriate activity to be carried out with taxpayer funds?

Madam Chairman, the problem with nation-building and social-engineering, as experience tells us time and time again is that it simply doesn't work. We cannot build multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, gender-sensitive civil society and good governance in Afghanistan on a top-down basis from afar. What this bill represents is a commitment to deepening involvement in Afghanistan and a determination to impose a political system on that country based on a blueprint drawn up thousands of miles away by Washington elites. Does anyone actually believe that we can buy Afghan democracy with even the staggering sum of 1.2 billion dollars? A real democracy is the product of shared values and the willingness of a population to demand and support it. None of these things can be purchased by a foreign power. What is needed in Afghanistan is not just democracy, but freedom- the two are not the same.

Release of funds authorized by this legislation is dependent on the holding of a traditional Afghan assembly of tribal representatives- a "loya jirga"- as a first step toward democratization. It authorizes \$10 million dollars to finance this meeting. That this traditional meeting will produce anything like a truly representative body is already in question, as we heard earlier this month that seven out of 33 influential tribal leaders have already announced they will boycott the meeting. Additionally, press reports have indicated that the U.S. government itself was not too long ago involved in an attempted assassination of a non-Taliban regional leader who happened to be opposed to the rule of the American-installed Hamid Karzai. More likely, this

"loya jirga" will be a stage-managed showpiece, primarily convened to please Western donors. Is this any way to teach democracy?

Madam Chairman, some two decades ago the Soviet Union also invaded Afghanistan and attempted to impose upon the Afghan people a foreign political system. Some nine years and 15,000 Soviet lives later they retreated in disgrace, morally and financially bankrupt. During that time, we propped up the Afghan resistance with our weapons, money, and training, planting the seeds of the Taliban in the process. Now the former Soviet Union is gone, its armies long withdrawn from Afghanistan, and we're left cleaning up the mess- yet we won't be loved for it. No, we won't get respect or allegiance from the Afghans, especially now that our bombs have rained down upon them. We will pay the bills, however, Afghanistan will become a tragic ward of the American state, another example of an interventionist foreign policy that is supposed to serve our national interests and gain allies, yet which does neither.

I repeat that the President has not been interested in this legislation. I do not see a good reason to give him the burden of reporting back to us in 45 days to explain how he is going to provide for Afghan security for the long term. How long is long term? We have been in Korea now for 50 years. Are we planning to send troops that provide national security for Afghanistan? I think we should be more concerned about the security of this country and not wondering how we are going to provide the troops for long-term security in Afghanistan. We should be more concerned about the security of our ports. Madam Chairman, over the last several days and almost continuously, as a matter of fact, many Members get up and talk about any expenditure or any tax cut as an attack on Social Security, but we do not hear this today because there is a coalition, well built, to support this intervention and presumed occupation of Afghanistan. But the truth is, there are monetary and budget consequences for this. After this bill is passed, if this bill is to pass, we will be close to \$2 billion in aid to Afghanistan, not counting the military. Now, that is an astounding amount of money, but it seems like it is irrelevant here. Twelve months ago, the national debt was \$365 billion less than it is today, and people say we are just getting away from having surpluses. Well, \$365 billion is a huge deficit, and the national debt is going up at that rate. April revenues were down 30 percent from 1 year ago. The only way we pay for programs like this is either we rob Social Security or we print the money, but both are very harmful to poor people and people living on a limited income. Our funds are not unlimited. I know there is a lot of good intention; nobody in this body is saying we are going over there to cause mischief, but let me tell my colleagues, there is a lot of reasons not to be all that optimistic about these wonderful results and what we are going to accomplish over there. Madam Chairman, earlier the gentleman from California (Mr. Rohrabacher) came up with an astounding reason for us to do this. He said that we owe this to Afghanistan. Now, I have heard all kinds of arguments for foreign aid and foreign intervention, but the fact that we owe this to Afghanistan? Do we know what we owe? We owe responsibility to the American taxpayer. We owe responsibility to the security of this country. One provision of this bill takes a \$300 million line of credit from our DOD and just gives the President the authority to take \$300 million of weapons away from us and give it to somebody in Afghanistan. Well, that dilutes our

defense, that does not help our defense. This is not beneficial. We do not need to have an occupation of Afghanistan for security of this country. There is no evidence for that. The occupation of Afghanistan is unnecessary. It is going to be very costly, and it is very dangerous. My colleagues might say, well, this is all for democracy. For democracy? Well, did we care about democracy in Venezuela? It seemed like we tried to undermine that just recently. Do we care about the democracy in Pakistan? A military dictator takes over and he becomes our best ally, and we use his land, and yet he has been a friend to the Taliban, and who knows, bin Laden may even be in Pakistan. Here we are saying we are doing it all for democracy. Now, that is just pulling our leg a little bit too much. This is not the reason that we are over there. We are over there for a lot of other reasons and, hopefully, things will be improved. But I am terribly concerned that we will spend a lot of money, we will become deeply mired in Afghanistan, and we will not do a lot better than the Soviets did. Now, that is a real possibility that we should not ignore. We say, oh, no, everything sounds rosy and we are going to do this, we are going to do it differently, and this time it is going to be okay. Well, if we look at the history of that land and that country, I would think that we should have second thoughts. It has been said that one of the reasons why we need this legislation is to help pay for drug eradication. Now, that is a good idea. That would be nice if we could do that. But the drug production has exploded since we have been there. In the last year, it is just going wild. Well, that is even more reason we have to spend money because we contributed to the explosion of the drug production. There is money in this bill, and maybe some good will come of this; there is money in this bill that is going to be used to teach the Afghan citizens not to use drugs. Mr. Speaker, if this is successful, if we teach the Afghan people not to use drugs, that would be wonderful. Maybe then we can do something about the ravenous appetite of our people for drugs which is the basic cause of so much drug production. So to spend money on these kinds of programs I think is just a little bit of a stretch. Already there have been 33 tribal leaders that have said they will not attend this Loya Jirga, that they are not going to attend. The fact that we are going to spend millions of dollars trying to gather these people together and tell them what to do with their country, I think the odds of producing a secure country are slim. Already in the papers just a few weeks ago it was reported in The Washington Post that our CIA made an attempt to assassinate a former prime minister of Afghanistan. He may have been a bum for all I know, but do Members think that sits well? He was not an ally of bin Laden, he was not a Taliban member, yet our CIA is over there getting involved. As a matter of fact, that is against our law, if that report is true. Yet, that is what the papers have reported. So I would say that we should move cautiously. I think this is very dangerous. I know nobody else has spoken out against this bill, but I do not see much benefit coming from this. I know it is well motivated, but it is going to cost a lot of money, we are going to get further engaged, more troops are going to go over there; and now that we are a close ally of Pakistan, we do know that Pakistan and India both have nuclear weapons, and we are sitting right next to them. So I would hardly think this is advantageous for our security, nor advantageous for the American people, nor advantageous to the American taxpayer. I see this as a threat to our security. It does not reassure me one bit. This is what scares me. It scares me when we send troops into places like Vietnam and Korea and other places, because it ultimately comes back to haunt us.